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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 FREETOWN 000530

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR AF/W (JHUNTER/ESPRUILL)

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [SL](#)

SUBJECT: MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS DISHES ON FELLOW
CABINET MEMBERS

REF: A. FREETOWN 524

[1](#)B. FREETOWN 529

Classified By: Ambassador June Carter Perry for reasons 1.4(b/d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Ambassador and Poloff met with Foreign Affairs Minister Zainab Bangura on October 30. Bangura discussed travel schedules, the need for donor coordination, and outcomes from the President's various recent meetings in New York and Washington. She also spoke candidly about challenges within the APC party, including those which threaten the success of Koroma's administration. She identified the Attorney General and Minister of Information and Communication as particular troublemakers within the Cabinet, both of whom are negatively impacting the government's efficacy. End Summary.

TRAVEL, TRAVEL, AND MORE TRAVEL

[1](#)2. (C) The Foreign Minister discussed upcoming travel schedules for herself and President Koroma. Bangura will be in China November 2-14, Burkina Faso on December 2, and leaves December 12 for a Peace Building Commission meeting on the 15th in New York. She intends to be in Freetown for the month of January, except to attend an African Union summit. The President may go to Norway December 3, and attend an ECOWAS summit in Abuja December 18-19, but has yet to confirm his travel. Bangura noted the Mano River Union Heads of State Conference, which will be hosted in Freetown December 9-11.

DONOR COORDINATION

[1](#)3. (U) Ambassador reiterated her concern regarding the lack of sufficient donor coordination in Sierra Leone, stating how successful sectoral coordination had been at other posts. She further suggested sectoral Memoranda of Understanding that clearly delineates the roles and responsibilities of each donor, to prevent duplication of efforts. The Minister was open to this suggestion, and would like this topic to be addressed at her next MFA roundtable meeting with the international Heads of Delegations.

MEETINGS IN NYC AND DC VIEWED AS SUCCESSFUL

[1](#)4. (C) Bangura highlighted the meetings she and the President attended in New York and Washington, clearly pleased at the level of attention they received from various parties. She informed Ambassador that former President Clinton would like to visit Sierra Leone, and she would inform embassy on potential dates as soon as they are identified. Television star Isaiah Washington, who has traced his ancestry to Sierra Leone, is planning a visit in December, with dates also

forthcoming. The President and Foreign Minister attended a lunch with the Corporate Council on Africa, which was favorably received. She would like further assistance in making possible investment connections. The Minister stated that AGOA founder Rosa Whitaker also expressed interest in coming to Freetown.

CABINET MEMBER FOLLIES

15. (C) In the context of discussing the ongoing cocaine case (reftel B), the Foreign Minister spoke frankly about the conflicted relationship between the President and Attorney General Abdul Serry-Kamal. She cited the AG as Koroma's "biggest enemy within the country," a comment based largely on Serry-Kamal's recent legal case to remove Koroma from his position as APC leader. Though the case was settled out of court, little love is lost between Koroma and Serry-Kamal. Bangura noted that Serry-Kamal was not Koroma's first, or even second choice for the Attorney General position, and his performance, particularly regarding the cocaine case, has been lackluster. Serry-Kamal, according to Bangura, even sleeps in Cabinet meetings. Despite harsh words for the Attorney General, Bangura gave no indication that his position is in jeopardy.

16. (C) Per reftel A, the Foreign Minister raised concerns about the Minister of Information and Communication presenting false statements to members of the press. In particular, she cited his mishandling of a press conference in which he made statements without authority. At the press

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conference, which covered the Commission of Inquiry charged with investigating misuse of donor funds by the former Kabbah administration (reftel A), Minister Alhaji Kargbo stated that former Ministers will not be held responsible for findings of corruption identified by the Commission. According to Bangura, corruption cases could be levied depending the Commission's findings. Given Kargbo's unauthorized statement, it will be impossible for corruption charges to be brought without vociferous complaints from the SLPP, which already considers the Commission a "witch-hunt."

COMMENT

17. (C) Bangura's unguarded remarks about fellow Cabinet Ministers confirmed several theories: (1) Serry-Kamal, considered by emboffs to be a primary obstacle to the successful completion of the cocaine case, is known within the Cabinet to be an undisciplined and ineffective Attorney General; and (2) the Commission of Inquiry was designed to identify former corrupt officials for the purpose of prosecution, as opposed to be merely an exercise of information-gathering and assignment of toothless blame. The first point will be discussed septel, while the second point changes the complexion of party politics in Sierra Leone. Though mud-slinging is common here, allegations of misdeeds rarely move beyond finger-pointing. The intent of this Commission is thus unique, as it targets the past administration, had the apparent intent of producing information to enable corruption charges, and would potentially eliminate still-popular APC rivals. An interesting question which will likely never be answered is why Kargbo spoke out of turn and made the Commission another actor in the typical Sierra Leonean blame-game. End comment.
PERRY